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Property owner wants air monitor removed

By Don Hopey
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

The owner of a former strip mine site across the Monongahela River from the Clarion Coke Works has asked Allegheny County to remove a pollution monitor that regularly registers the highest readings in the county for airborne particulates.

The request comes as the county, USX and other businesses and municipalities around Clairton are fighting a rule proposed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that would reclassify the area as in "serious nonattainment" of air standards.

Such a ruling would cost industry and municipalities millions of dollars to reduce emissions. Charles Carson, USX vice president for environmental affairs, estimated that it would cost his company more than \$100 million to comply with the new classification.

Studies have found that high levels of the minute particles cause lung disease, heart ailments and premature death.

Sid Mendlowitz, the property owner who requested removal of the Lincoln monitor in a letter to the county Health Department, said yesterday that his reasons for the request were personal and he intended to have the property redeveloped.

But his letter, which carries a Lon-Ron Truck Rentals letterhead, indicates he is more concerned with the economic impact of the monitor on area communities.

"I have only now realized," Mendlowitz wrote, "that letting Allegheny County operate a PM-10 monitor on the site can result in major economic impact to all communities in the ... area."

Property owner wants air monitor removed

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mining; and construction.

The monitor, one of seven around Clairton, recorded one instance in 1992 in which particles exceeded the EPA standard, two instances each in 1993 and 1994 and two this year.

Clairton and the boroughs of Lincoln, Port Vue, Liberty and Glassport are now classified by the EPA as in "moderate nonattainment" under provisions of the 1990 Clean Air Act because pollution monitors recorded higher than allowable levels of the airborne particles in 1988, 1989 and 1990.

The area is the only part of Allegheny County that fails to meet federal air quality standards for breathable particulates.

By far the biggest single source of the particles in the Clairton area is the USX coke works.

Along with the county Health Department, USX has urged local governments to pass resolutions opposing the federal reclassification.

The county and the company both say the State Implementation Plan, submitted in December 1994, should be given time to work, and they are requesting a one-year extension to demonstrate that attainment can be accomplished.

Several South Hills communities recently have joined the five boroughs immediately affected in requesting the extension period. Baldwin Borough and Jefferson

Health Department's division of air quality, disagreed.

"Just the opposite is true," he said. "Our argument is it's going to be more harmful to remove it now, because there'll be no way to show air quality improvements."

Westman said the county would meet with Mendlowitz in an attempt to get him to change his mind.

The monitor, which was installed on Mendlowitz's Lincoln property in 1992, measures fine particles that are known as PM-10s because they measure about one ten-thousandth of an inch, or one-40th the diameter of a human hair. The fine particles come mostly from industrial

plant emissions; car, bus and truck engines; wood burning;

have passed resolutions of support and the extension also has been endorsed by the Mon-Yough Chamber of Commerce Federation.

"It would be a serious blow to the entire area if Clairton Works closed its doors. That's why we have to take action," Baldwin Councilman Sam McPherson told his fellow council members at the Oct. 16 meeting.

A public comment period on the proposed reclassification has been extended a month until Nov. 19.

Mendlowitz said he had not spoken to USX about removing a monitor the company installed this year adjacent to the county monitor on his property.

USX installed its monitor after failing to persuade the county to move the Lincoln monitor from the site the county had determined to be a "hot spot" for fine particles, on the bluff overlooking the Monongahela River directly across from the USX Coke Works.

USX said the Lincoln monitor produced unfairly high readings of airborne particulates.

"All the other monitors around Clairton are located where people live and work," Carson said. "The nearest residents to the Lincoln monitor are one-quarter to three-eighths of a mile away. Because the monitor is at about the same elevation as our stacks across the river, it's measuring stack emissions, not ambient air quality."

Letters from the EPA, the Group Against Smog and Pollution, the Sierra Club's Allegheny Group, and Steve Kadar, president of Lincoln council, have supported keeping the monitor.

"We believe it's an important monitor and agree with the EPA that it is properly sited," said Marie Kocoshis, GASP president.

Jim McMahon, a Bethel Park free-lance writer, contributed to this report.

mean department, environmentalists split over Clairton air quality assessment

By Don Palmerino

Pittsburgh TRIBUNE-REVIEW Sunday 10/22/95 pg A1

The federal Environmental Protection Agency wants to reclassify the air quality in the greater Clairton area. And while local officials say the move would be an economic disaster, an environmental group supports the measure.

The EPA's proposal to reclassify the air quality in Clairton, Glassport, Liberty, Lincoln and Port Vue to "serious nonattainment" status will cause serious consequences, says Guillermo Cole, spokesman for the Allegheny County Health Department.

The proposal is based on the amount of airborne PM-10, which means particulate matter smaller than 10 micrometers. A micrometer is one millionth of a meter.

"If the reclassification goes through, the industry in that area would have to face additional pollution controls to meet the requirements as set forth by the Clean Air Act," Cole said. "Municipalities also would face financial hardships with the purchase of such expensive equipment as street sweepers."

Cole fears changing the classification could threaten economic stability in the region and force the possible closure of the Clairton Works operated by U.S. Steel, a division of USX Corp.

As part of the public comment period on the reclassification, the health department -- which oversees air quality in those areas -- along with various municipalities have



Philip G. Pavely

U.S. Steel's Clairton Works exerts a major influence on air quality

asked the EPA for a one-year extension to come into compliance.

The county spent almost \$2 million on a State Implementation Plan, or SIP, to bring the air quality up to standard, but the plan was initiated more than two years late.

"It takes about three years before the SIP can work," Cole said.

The SIP was created because the air quality in the Clairton area was designated at "moderate nonattainment" levels. The 1990

Clean Air Act required regions with moderate nonattainment problems to submit implementation plan by Nov. 15, 1991.

Cole said reclassification could jeopardize the SIP and waste the \$2 million already spent. He said it would send officials back to the drawing board for a plan calling for more emissions reductions costing additional millions of dollars.

"We would have to start all over," Cole

PLEASE SEE CLAIRTON/A10

EPA moves to reassess air quality

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said, "and that would be a shame."

The Clairton Works also asked the EPA for an extension and has sent representatives to surrounding communities asking them to urge the EPA to grant the extension. Jefferson Borough passed a resolution asking for the extension, while Pleasant Hills officials said more study is needed before a decision is made.

Meanwhile, the Group Against Smog and Pollution, or GASP, has sent a letter of intent to the EPA saying it will file a civil suit against the agency if it doesn't act on its findings.

Marie Kocoshis, president of GASP, said her group supports the findings of the EPA. "It was something they were required to do," Kocoshis said. "Now they have to stand by it."

Kocoshis said GASP has no opinion concerning the request for the one-year extension. "We're still looking at all the information," Kocoshis said.

She said the county's implementation plan was in place when the EPA determined whether the air quality was in compliance.

"All the components were in place," Kocoshis said, "yet there were violations. If the plan was designed to comply with the EPA standards, how come that didn't happen? It's obvious the plan didn't work."

Kocoshis said the public should be made aware of just how dangerous emissions from a coke plant can be. She said this fact is being lost in all the rhetoric.

"Our main concern is the health of everyone in the area," Kocoshis said. "We believe that a clean environment, jobs and a healthy economy can go hand in hand."

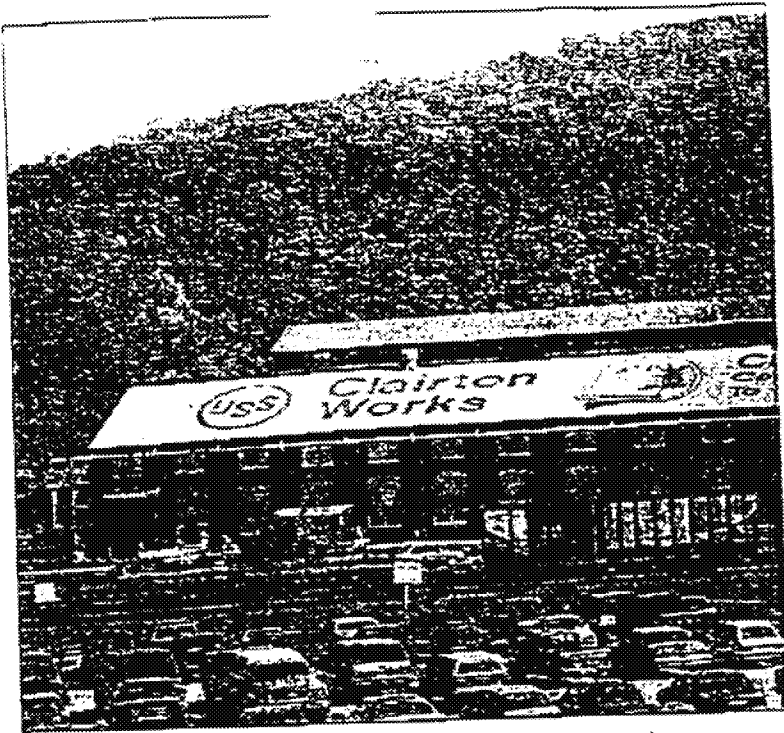
Kocoshis said that while there have been some arguments that air quality monitors were placed far from populated areas, their locations shouldn't be an issue because the EPA has guidelines for where readings should be taken.

One monitor is located at Gobblers Knob in Lincoln Borough.

IN A 'HOT ZONE'

"I know that one is placed in a 'hot zone,'" Kocoshis said. "Evidently, the reading taken from the Lincoln monitor was in the hot zone and was not in compliance and considered serious nonattainment."

Shirley Virostek, a director with the EPA, said there are citizens throughout her community who



Clairton Works: Asking the EPA for more time to meet standards

health department.

"I'm quite upset with the position the health department has taken," Virostek said. "The department is wrong in threatening small towns with economic disaster. As soon as you throw out economics to a small community, everyone forgets about health. The health department has defeated itself."

Virostek, a member of both the Sierra Club and a subcommittee that oversaw the SIP, believes the health department just doesn't want to spend more money on a SIP, even though it would have five years to develop another one.

"Under the Clean Air Act, when an area is determined to be in serious nonattainment, the EPA gives the community five years to implement a plan," Virostek said. "They just don't want to spend the time and money again. It was a lot of work for a lot of people and they don't want to do it again."

Virostek said the monitor set up at Lincoln was the first one located so it could pick up wind blowing from different directions.

"You have to watch the readings of monitors very closely," Virostek said. "Wind direction is important. Monitors will pick up different readings, even if they're close by. It all depends on which way the wind is blowing."

Virostek said there are citizens throughout her community who

asthma and cancer, which makes the air quality in the area very important.

"The health department and U.S. Steel should do the right thing and stop putting out all this propaganda," Virostek said. "I know the Clairton Works is a complex industry and you just can't throw it out. But the health of people is of utmost importance."

William Graeser, senior environmental control engineer for U.S. Steel, said the monitors that showed serious nonattainment were located on hillsides, miles from populated areas.

"The monitors in the populated areas tested out with lower readings," Graeser said. "But they used the ones on the hillsides, miles from residential areas."

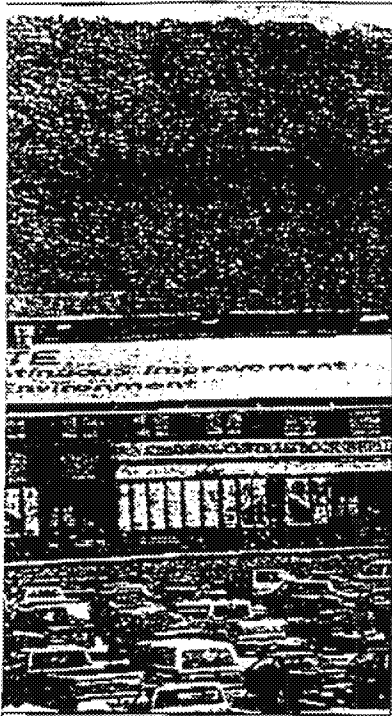
Graeser said the SIP is an excellent plan that would bring the air quality up to attainment. "We need the extra time to demonstrate this," Graeser said. "That's all we're asking."

Cole said the SIP took longer than expected to achieve its aims, missing the EPA deadline by more than two years, because of the complex climate and the unusual terrain and river conditions in the area. "We did not have the plan in place because we had to come up with some original ideas," Cole said.

"Under the Clean Air Act, we are

ty in greater Clairton

Philip G. Pavely photo



sions for three straight years," he added. "Three years is how long the plan needs to demonstrate its effectiveness."

Cole said there are other reasons for the poor air quality in the area besides emissions coming from the Clairton Works, including other industries, dust from construction sites and automobile emissions.

"It can't be blamed all on one source," Cole said.

MOST IN COMPLIANCE

Ernie Glenn, spokesman for U.S. Steel, said most of the monitors registered compliance. "The two measuring instruments in the monitor that measured nonattainment do not agree," Glenn said. "One recorded nonattainment five times, the other only once."

Tom Casey, EPA Particle Matter Program coordinator, said his office wants to hear as much public comment as possible.

"We're getting different information and different objections," Casey said. "We want to evaluate all of the information as a whole."

Casey said it also is important to get all the information on the public record. Already several communities officially have asked the EPA for the extension. So has the Mon-Yough Chamber of Commerce Federation, which sent a letter to the EPA asking the agency to reconsider its findings.

a position that the economy must be taken into account when making environmental regulatory decisions," said chamber President Thomas Juravich. "We think a review of the facts will justify a closer look at reclassifying the air quality on our area."

Casey said that some of the air quality findings were gathered after the county's SIP was in place, which the EPA will consider when making its final decision on reclassification. He said the region's SIP was due Nov. 15, 1991, and it wasn't in place until Jan. 1, 1994.

Casey said some of the serious nonattainment findings were based on readings taken in February and March of 1994. "We will have to determine how far in place their plan was at that time and how much effect it had had."

Casey said it is the EPA's standard procedure to monitor air quality in "ambient air" as well as near populated areas.

According to the ambient air monitoring data as reviewed in the *Federal Register*, readings taken from the Lincoln high-volume sampler on Gobblers Knob showed five incidents, from 1992-94, of nonattainment of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. That number was enough for the EPA to classify the region as a serious nonattainment area.

The health department believes the Lincoln area should be considered nonclassifiable because there are two monitors in Lincoln Borough — within a few feet of each other — gave conflicting results.

"The five communities should not be classified as nonattainment (areas) based on data from one monitor," Cole said. "The Lincoln monitor is not representative of the general area and is not in a populated area."

Casey said the monitors are in the right place and the results were attained under strict guidelines.

"Many of the monitors are on top of hills," Casey said. "But that is not unusual."

Cole said the Lincoln monitor is normally in compliance on a daily average and only during "extreme inversions and stagnant air" conditions are there problems.

Casey said he couldn't predict the outcome of the EPA's findings until all the public comment has been received. "We can't even give an opinion of their chances for an extension," Casey said.

The deadline for public comment to the EPA on the extension is 11:54 a.m. on Oct. 24, 1995.